

## **Pruning Tips for One and Two Year Old Walnut Trees**

*Janine Hasey, UC Farm Advisor, Sutter and Yuba Counties*

Young walnut trees are sensitive to freezing temperatures which can kill or damage wood so it is best to delay pruning until March or late February at the earliest. The method used to train young trees will vary depending on whether the planting is a standard- spaced orchard or hedgerow system.

### **Standard-spaced orchards**

#### **Pruning one-year old walnut trees in the modified central leader system:**

- The leader, or shoot selected to be the trunk, should have reached a height of at least 7 to 8 feet. Ten feet or more of growth is better. The height at which the leader is headed will establish the height of the first primary scaffold.
- Heading the leader at 8 feet will give more area for the scaffolds. The leader should not be headed any less than 6 ½ feet since the first primary scaffold should be at least 6 feet above the ground so as not to interfere with equipment operation. Make the heading cut into mature round wood.
- Any lateral shoots on the leader should be removed. 1 or 2 nonvigorous shoots arising below the leader can be stubbed to 2 to 3 buds to provide shade on the south and west sides and to aid caliper growth. They will be removed in the next dormant season.
- Any primary buds above 5 feet from the ground that are necked should be rubbed off to the side so as not to damage the secondary bud. If left, necked buds form weak limb attachments that are subject to breakage. The secondary bud which is forced to grow will form a wide angle and develop a strong crotch.
- If the shoot selected to be the trunk has not reached sufficient height, cut it 3 to 6 buds above the point of origin and remove competing shoots. A stronger shoot can then be trained as the trunk over the summer.

#### **Pruning two-year old walnut trees in the modified central leader system:**

- The general goal is to select four to six primary scaffolds arising from the trunk in years two and three.
- The first primary scaffold should be at least six feet above ground.
- Select other primary scaffolds to form a spiral pattern around the trunk. Ideally they should be one foot apart vertically, but in reality, try to space them at least eight inches apart.
- Primary scaffolds should never originate directly opposite each other; this will ensure the leader does not get 'choked out'.
- Selected scaffolds should be angled about 45 degrees from the vertical. Limbs with narrower angles or bark inclusions are usually poorly attached and cannot support heavy crops and branches with wider angles of attachment may fail to grow vigorously.
- For lateral bearing varieties (most except Hartley and Franquette), head all primary scaffolds ¼ to ½ depending on vigor and variety. The leader should be left the longest.
- Remove vigorous lateral limbs close to or competing with the main scaffolds. Small branches can be left unheaded to fruit early on vigorous trees.

### **Hedgerow Planting System**

#### **Pruning one-year old hedgerow walnut trees:**

- Head the leader (trunk) at about 5 to 6 feet. The buds left below will develop into the tree's framework.
- The lowest framework branch should be a minimum of three feet from the ground; above this, side shoots and necked buds should be removed.

#### **Pruning two-year old hedgerow walnut trees:**

- Select a central leader and two to four side limbs that are oriented in opposite directions in the tree row.
- Remove branches below three feet that will interfere with shaking and flat limbs that grow out into the middles.
- Depending on variety and vigor, selected framework limbs should be headed ¼ to ½ their length; cut to an outside bud facing into the tree row. Other branches can be left unheaded to fruit early.

Always remove suckers from the rootstock on all trees.